

Bloom

She liked to go to the lab late at night and observe the sex lives of micro-organisms. Tonight, the conditions were just right for her to watch the *bacillus anthracis* reproduce. These bacteria caused the often-fatal disease, anthrax, whose symptoms included severe pulmonary problems, vomiting blood, and boil-like lesions on the skin. Under the white light, however, they looked almost benign; colourful and rotund, like children's toys. As she watched, they multiplied rapidly, hundreds of little rod-like structures becoming thousands within minutes, mushrooming in a hypnotic swell, a rhythmic blooming.

What was the right word for it? *Cleaving*, perhaps: each bacterium splitting off from itself, asunder, yet all the while remaining utterly faithful, true to its own being, an exact copy.

She imagined her own body becoming small, squeezing through the microscope's eyepiece, being sucked down into the teeming, erotic movement of binary fission. She had often thought about how the bacteria might sound as they tore apart, and if they felt smooth or coarse or sticky. Through the lens, she thought she saw herself: a little naked woman swimming, slow and impassive, amongst the slippery hordes. She wondered what they would smell like, and how they might respond to her touch.